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C.H. Friend School – An Old-School Model Finding New Success

JOHN THEO JR. MAY 24, 2025 4 MIN READ 7



Third graders sharing their projects. Courtesy of the C.H. Friend School

While a new brick high school, in all its splendor, is being constructed on Old Halifax Road in South Boston, we have another hidden gem in our community. On a quiet side street in a residential neighborhood sits C.H. Friend School, a brick schoolhouse from a bygone era that looks like it belongs in a Hallmark movie. Built in 1939, it operated as a high school until 1953. From 1954 to 2008, it served as an elementary school. Times changed, and the school eventually closed. In 2010, C.H. Friend was auctioned off and sat vacant for over a decade.

In 2021, longtime educator Dana Jones was the principal of a self-taught Christian school in Halifax County. (Self-taught means the students work independently and only receive help from teachers when needed.) Jones wanted to move her school towards a traditional instructor-led curriculum, but knew it would take over a decade to do so. She knew instructor-led curricula were vital to learning, and Halifax County had no private schools with this option. Dana and her husband Albert did everything they could and prayed about it.



2024-2025 School year group picture. Courtesy of the C.H. Friend School

In early 2022, the Joneses met current C.H. Friend building owner Jack Dunavant, who had purchased the building at auction in 2010. Jack's story is another fantastic tale that would fill a romance novel. Jack desperately wanted to save the building as a tribute to his seven decades of marriage with his now-deceased wife. C.H. Friend was where Jack met Bertha Jane in the early 1950s, when they were teens. He also wanted to open the building as a school again, but his background was in construction, not education. Jones and Dunavant came to an agreement to open the doors that fall as a Christian school.

That was great news. The bad news was that it gave Dana and Albert Jones only 37 days to hire staff, advertise for students, develop curriculum, and clean a school building that had been empty for over a decade. Word quickly spread, and the entire community came out to help.

"It was a ton of hard work, but it was God-ordained," Dana said. "We should not have been able to finish it in that timeframe."



Student reading activity. Courtesy of the C.H. Friend School

On July 1, students began to enroll at a friend's business in Greens Folly because the school was still under construction. On that first day, parents showed up to enroll 80 children. Many other miracles happened along the way.

One example Dana mentioned was when she and Albert bid on school surplus items at an online auction to help fill the classrooms. "We bid on 200 desks at \$6 each and won," she said, "but when we arrived in Virginia Beach for pick-up, we discovered the entire auction had been for only \$6."

On Sept. 6, 2022, C.H. Friend welcomed 110 students. Today, 22 dedicated full-time teachers with a combined 224 years of educational experience teach 170 students.



Students taking part in an elective. Courtesy of the C.H. Friend School

C.H. Friend serves pre-K (three-year-olds) through 12th grade and utilizes a variety of academic curricula. For kindergarten, the University of Florida Literacy Institute curriculum, which is rules-based, gives the children structure. The Wit and Wisdom curriculum is used for third through eighth grade English, which teaches kids to think critically. For history, the school utilizes pre-2011 textbooks, which, according to the Joneses, were still in that "sweet spot" of teaching fundamentals before politicizing crept into academia. Finally, the school uses Bob Jones University for its science curriculum. C.H. Friend also incorporates specialties such as art, music, sign language, creative writing, and public speaking into students' studies.

When asked what the future holds for C.H. Friend, Dana said they hope to grow the school beyond 300 students, but she is adamant they will keep the student-teacher ratio at or under 15:1. The school is also focused on growing its athletics programs. It currently offers a variety of sports for both boys' and girls' teams, such as volleyball, soccer, basketball, softball, and baseball.



Dana Jones and her husband Albert Courtesy of the C.H. Friend School

The famous adage goes, "Everything old is new again." That sums up much of what C.H. Friend stands for, from the beautiful 1930s brick school building to the traditional curriculum and the Christian foundation it's based upon. What started as a prayer by a handful of people came together through nothing short of a series of miracles. C.H. Friend is a testament to faith and community.



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